RAJENDAR M. SAINI,
PETITIONER

DEFORE THE ZONING BOARD
OF HOWARD COUNTY
ZONING BOARD CASE NO. 1061M

DECISION AND ORDER

On July 12, 2006 the Zoning Board of Howard County, Maryland considered the petition of Rajendar M. Saini to amend the Zoning Map of Howard County so as to reclassify from the RR-DEO (Rural Residential-Density Exchange Option) to the OT (Office Transition) Zoning District, 3.027 acres of land located on the east side of MD 97 approximately 1,000 feet south of McKendree Road, and identified as Tax Map 14, Grid 17, Parcel 229, Lot 44 in the Fourth Election District of Howard County.

The notice of the hearing was advertised, the subject property was posted with notice of the hearing, and the adjoining property owners were mailed notice of the hearing as evidenced by the certificates of posting, advertising and mailing to adjoining property owners which were entered into the record. Pursuant to the Zoning Board's Rules of Procedure, all of the reports and official documents pertaining to the petition, including the petition, the Technical Staff Report of the Department of Planning and Zoning and the Planning Board's recommendation, were entered or incorporated into the record of the hearing. The Department of Planning and Zoning recommended denial of the petition with potential for approval. The Planning Board recommended denial of the petition.

The Petitioner was represented by Richard B. Talkin, Esq. and Sang Oh, Esq. Several residents appeared in opposition, represented by E. Alexander Adams, Esq. and David F. Mister, Esq.

After careful evaluation of all the information presented, the Zoning Board of Howard County makes the following findings of fact and conclusions of law:

FINDINGS OF FACT

- 1. The Petitioner proposes rezoning of the 3.027 acre subject property to the OT District. Because the OT District is a floating zone, the Petitioner presented testimony and evidence relating to the criteria in Section 117.3G of the Howard County Zoning Regulations rather than to the change-mistake rule applicable to Euclidean rezoning cases.
- 2. As required by the OT District requirements, the Petitioner submitted a Preliminary Development Plan (PDP) with the petition showing the proposed development of the subject property, a health center comprised of professional medical and dental offices with examination rooms. In response to pre-submission meeting comments and the comments of the Department of Planning and Zoning and the Planning Board, the Petitioner amended the original PDP for presentation to the Zoning Board.
- 3. Mr. John Slater, a landscape architect, testified on behalf of the Petitioner. Mr. Slater summarized the changes made from the original PDP to the amended PDP. He indicated that the amended PDP reduced the size of the proposed building, reduced the hours of operation and reduced the parking and took it out of the setback encroachment area.

The amended PDP has two alternative proposals for the building, one with a garage and one without the garage. Mr. Slater indicated that the building size would be a maximum of 5000 square feet, 3000 square feet on the first floor and 2000 square feet on the second floor with the 24 foot by 40 foot garage (960 square feet) being considered as additional area to the proposed building.

Mr. Slater also testified that the 25 parking spaces were reconfigured so as to not encroach into the 50 foot side structure and use setback area, as commented on by the Department of Planning and Zoning in its TSR, so that a variance would no longer be required for the parking.

Mr. Slater testified that the proposed hours of operation on the amended PDP would be 8 a.m. until 8 p.m. Monday through Friday, 8 a.m. until 5 p.m. on Saturday and 9 a.m. until 5 p.m. on Sunday by emergency only.

- 4. Mr. Slater indicated that the access to the subject property would be by a driveway from MD 97 directly opposite the access to Bushy Park Elementary School. He stated that the proposed building would be located center-forward on the subject property with all of the parking located between the building and MD 97, away from the residential neighborhood to the southeast of the building.
- 5. Mr. Slater testified that the subject property, lot 44 in the Glenwood Springs subdivision (plat 7679), recorded in 1988, had no access through the subdivision but instead derived its access directly off of MD 97. He indicated that all of the other residential lots in the subdivision gain access by way of Shadow Roll Court, an internal subdivision road, and then on to Glenwood Springs Road and Hobbs Road.
- 6. Mr. Slater testified that the existing trees on the subject property adjacent to the residential lots in the Glenwood Springs subdivision would remain and that the Petitioner would also provide the required landscape buffering.
- 7. Mr. Slater testified that he believed the development on the subject property would be compatible with vicinal residential structures due to the location of the structures on the front of the subject property, the size of the building and the fact that the building was

designed to resemble a residential structure except for the parking. Mr. Slater added that there would be a very large backyard (198 feet) between the proposed building on the subject property and the property line, and that the distance between the back of the proposed building and the nearest residential structure in the Glenwood Springs subdivision would be 326 feet.

- 8. Mr. Slater described the mass, scale and effect of some of the surrounding non-residential uses and associated parking in the vicinity of the subject property, as identified on an aerial map, including Bushy Park Elementary School and Middle School across MD 97, St. Andrew's Church, Glenwood Office Park, the Glenwood Branch of the Howard County Library, Glenwood Gardens Nursery, the Innwood Shopping Center to the north across McKendree Road and the shopping center at MD 97 and Carrs Mill Road. Mr. Slater identified a number of photographs of views of these uses.
- 9. Mr. Slater testified that a typical home in the neighborhood of the subject property was 3-4,000 square feet or more in area so that the size of the proposed building on the amended PDP was compatible in terms of scale with that size home. Mr. Slater indicated that he believed an OT District with the proposed health center building and use would provide a transition along the edge of residential areas from nearby employment areas, a public school or schools and MD 97. Mr. Slater indicated that he thought the subject property met the Requirements for OT District as provided in Section 117.3B of the Howard County Zoning Regulations.
- property was residentially zoned and improved with a single-family residence and that the property to the immediate south was an unimproved residentially-zoned property. He also acknowledged that the property immediately to the west of the new Bushy Park Elementary School under construction was a 190 acre Agricultural Preservation parcel. Mr. Slater also

acknowledged that Glenwood Gardens was the only commercial use east of MD 97 between McKendree Road and Glenwood Gardens, and that Glenwood Gardens was approximately 4,000 feet from the subject property.

- 11. Mr. Slater indicated that the proposed lights on the PDP were necessary to provide safety on the parking lot. He also indicated that he did not believe that the lights would be visible from adjoining residential properties because the lights were designed to shine down and not out.
- 12. Mr. Neil Lang, an architect, testified next for the Petitioner. Mr. Lang indicated that he designed the proposed building on the subject property and had reviewed the amended PDP, both the plan with a garage and the one without a garage. Mr. Lang noted that the garage's purpose was to store lawn equipment necessary for maintaining the subject property's lawn.

Mr. Lang described the building itself as proposed doctor's offices that would be a low-impact use and designed in the character of a residential use. He also stated that the materials to be used in the building's construction would be all natural materials, brick and wood, and that the scale of the building, slightly less than 5000 square feet, would be compatible in scale with the surrounding residential uses. Mr. Lang presented an architectural rendering of the proposed building both with and without the garage. He noted that the entry to the building was residential in character.

13. Mr. Mark Keeler, a traffic consultant, testified as to traffic/access issues.

Mr. Keeler indicated that the sight distance in each direction at the property's proposed access point on MD 97 was more than 1000 feet, and that this more than met the 550 foot sight distance requirement for the 45 mph speed limit at this location on MD 97.

office building would generate 12 A.M. peak hour trips, 19 P.M. peak hour trips and 180 total trips per day on MD 97, a minimal effect on a road that has 15,000 – 20,000 Average Daily Trips. Mr. Keeler testified that based on the sight distance and traffic volumes he believed that safe access could be provided at the proposed access point to the site.

Mr. Keeler testified in response to the comments of the State Highway Administration's (SHA) contained in its May 16, 2006 report as a responding reviewing agency to the zoning petition.

The SHA, through Daniel Doherty signing on behalf of Steven D. Foster, Chief, Engineering Access Permits Division, indicated that it could not recommend approval of the proposed rezoning and development because the property owner owned only 128 feet of frontage on MD 97, insufficient to accommodate SHA's standard frontage improvements for the proposed commercial use. The SHA's required frontage improvements included a 16 foot wide, 550 foot long deceleration lane and a 16 foot wide, 300 foot long acceleration lane. In its report, the SHA indicated that "this [128 feet of frontage] is not sufficient frontage to provide the necessary improvements. If the developer can not obtain additional right-of way from the adjacent properties . . . the necessary improvements can not be provided."

Mr. Keeler indicated that he had a subsequent conversation with Mr. Doherty regarding the petition, and that Mr. Doherty indicated that SHA would lessen acceleration and deceleration lane requirements based on the number of trips to be generated by the proposed development, in particular that the deceleration lane requirement would be reduced from 550 feet to 300 feet.

Mr. Keeler also testified that Mr. Doherty had indicated that if the Petitioner was unable to obtain the necessary additional right-of-way from adjoining property owners, and provided

certified letters to that effect, that the decision on the right-of-way improvements would be made at a later date. Mr. Keeler stated that Mr. Doherty had indicated that the SHA would not deny access.

Mr. Keeler also indicated that he believed the Department of Planning and Zoning's comments in its Technical Staff Report regarding access were incorrect. On page 6 of TSR it was stated that "the site has frontage on and direct access to an arterial road [MD 97]. The site has frontage on MD 97, a Minor Arterial Road, so the petition complies with this requirement. However, this section also requires direct access to an arterial road. As noted elsewhere in this report, SHA has commented on access and frontage issues, and Plat 7684 currently restricts access to MD 97, so the petition does not currently meet this requirement."

Mr. Keeler also acknowledged that the width of the current access to the site was 20 feet, while the width of any proposed access driveway to MD 97 for a commercial use is required to be 24 feet under Howard County's requirements. Mr. Keeler testified that the County's 24 foot width requirement for a commercial access driveway could be varied upon application to the County.

Ms. Cassandra Jones Havard, Ms. Sue Baxter, Ms. Gina Dubbé, Mr. Dean Dubbé, Mr. Matt Eyre, Mr. David Bowers, Ms. Kelly Marciniak, Ms. Bonnie Cassidy, Ms. Marta Evans, Ms. Eileen Hanold, Ms. Joni Dorsey, Ms. Tiziana Matarese, and Mr. Tom Ulrich all testified in support of the petition. All of these witnesses except for Ms. Baxter were either patients or family members of patients of Dr. Saini and indicated that there was a great need for a full-time orthodontic office to be located in the western part of Howard County. Ms. Baxter, a dental supplier of Dr. Saini, indicated that Dr. Saini was already practicing on a part-time basis in the Innwood shopping center 1000 feet to the north of the subject property but that there was a great

need for dentist's and doctor's offices in western Howard County. Ms. Baxter testified that many of the doctors in the area are not taking any new patients.

- 16. Mr. John Startt, a builder and a friend of Dr. Saini, testified in behalf of the Petitioner. Mr. Startt testified that he's built houses in western Howard County. He indicated that he had shown the subject property to six prospective buyers over the last 18 months and that no one was interested in buying it at the asking price of \$575,000. Mr. Startt testified that the reason that none of the potential buyers were interested was because the lot fronted on and had access on MD 97, a very busy road, and because the lot was disjointed from the rest of the subdivision due to its access to MD 97. Mr. Startt indicated the location of the schools across MD 97 was not a significant factor in the potential buyers' lack of interest in buying the subject property. Mr. Startt also testified that there were only a few lots similar to the subject property from its location south to the Montgomery County line.
- 17. Dr. Ty Saini, the Petitioner's son, also testified. Dr. Saini indicated that he has been practicing as an orthodontist for eight years, the last five with his father. He stated that his father's main office was in Columbia, and that he operated a satellite office in the Innwood Shopping Center on McKendree Road.

Dr. Saini stated that the Innwood location did not work efficiently for shorter orthodonture appointments because open bay areas were necessary for those types of appointments. He also indicated that the reception area in the Innwood office was not large enough for their patients and those people that come with them to the appointments. Dr. Saini indicated that a number of people from the Glenwood area asked them to locate a full-time office in the Glenwood area.

Dr. Saini testified that the proposed development of doctor's offices on the subject property would allow his father's practice to adequately support his western Howard County patients. He added that western Howard County patients who must travel to Columbia for appointments lose about one hour of instruction time for even a brief appointment.

Dr. Saini indicated that the requested hours for Monday through Friday were 8 A.M. to 8 P.M. but that hours after 5 P.M. would rarely be needed. Dr. Saini testified that Dr. Saini's practice was planned for the second floor of the proposed building and that 1-3 physicians' offices would be located on the ground floor although no definite plans for that use had been made. He also indicated that he estimated the total number of patients seen per day would be 40 but he acknowledged that this was speculative.

Dr. Saini indicated that supplies would be delivered to the proposed use by a FedEx or UPS truck to a larger delivery truck and that a trash service would utilized for waste disposal so there would be no dumpster located on-site.

Dr. Saini indicated that the proposed rezoning and development of the subject property would help to meet the underserved medical needs of western Howard County as recognized on page 145 of the 2000 Howard County General Plan. Dr. Saini also indicated that the subject petition would help to address the health needs of those people 55 and over. In that regard he estimated that 20% of his father's patients were 55 or over.

18. Dr. Rajendar Saini, the Petitioner, testified in favor of the petition. Dr. Saini reiterated some of the previous testimony. He indicated that he pursued this petition in response to encouragement by the community to locate a medical office on the subject property. He also testified that he had attempted to make his proposal as compatible as possible with the

surrounding residential community through the reduced size of the building, the residential design of the building, the subdued lights and the proposed buffering.

- 19. Dr. Saini acknowledged that he paid \$230,000 for the subject property in 2001.
- 20. Several vicinal residents, almost all of whom live in the Glenwood Springs subdivision, testified in opposition to the petition including Mr. Robert Beaver, Mr. Jack Milani, Ms. Julie Dillon, Mr. Brian Walsh, Mr. Craig Whitehead, Ms. Georgea Moore, Mr. Randall Smith, Mr. Steven Schrenk, Mr. David McDaniel, Ms. Laura Beaver, Ms. Nikki Walsh and Mr. Brad Walsh.

The residents' testimony in opposition was based on several factors including the fact that the larger area and the Glenwood Springs subdivision were residential in character and that the rezoning and would be incompatible with that residential character. Many of those who testified in opposition welcomed Dr. Saini's business in the Glenwood area but believed he should locate on an already commercially zoned parcel such as the two shopping centers approximately 1000 feet north of the subject property.

Another common theme of the residents' opposition testimony was that the Glenwood Springs subdivision did not need to be buffered from the public schools that are either existing or being constructed across MD 97 because those schools are compatible with and part of the community.

The residents also provided testimony that the subject property's access on MD 97 rather than through the subdivision did not exclude it from being part of the Glenwood Springs or make it undesirable as a site for residence. Some of the residents indicated that if greater efforts were made to market the subject property as residential it could be sold at a reasonable price.

- 21. The Board finds that the Petitioner has not established convincing evidence as to several of the standards of Section 117.3G of the Zoning Regulations. The Board notes that it must find that the Petitioner has met all of these standards of this Section before it may grant a petition for an OT District. Each of the pertinent standards will be addressed in the following findings of fact.
- 22. The Petitioner must present evidence that the district will accomplish the purposes of the OT District. The purpose of the OT District pursuant to Section 117.3A of the Zoning Regulations is to "allow low-impact office uses adjacent to areas of residential zoning... that will provide a transition along the edges of residential areas impacted by nearby retail/employment areas or arterial highways carrying high volumes of traffic. The standards of this district should result in small-scale office buildings on attractively-designed sites that are compatible with neighboring residential uses."
- 23. The evidence which Petitioner presented to show that the proposed OT District with the proposed doctor's offices on the subject property would accomplish the purpose of providing a transition between the adjacent residential areas and the retail/employment areas or arterial highways is insufficient to convince the Board that the rezoning would act as such a transition and meet the OT District's purposes. The Board finds that there was not convincing evidence presented that the school properties could be considered retail/employment areas in of themselves within the meaning of Section 117.3A. The only "nearby" retail/employment area within the meaning of Sections 117.3A and 117.3B.2.b is the non-residential district/shopping center across Carrs Mill Road from the new Bushy Park Elementary School. This retail/employment area is neither nearby the residential areas adjacent to the subject property, being over 1000 feet away, nor could it have any impact on the residential areas adjacent to the

subject property since two roads and a large school property lie between the residential areas and the retail/employment uses. Therefore, the Board finds that there is no convincing evidence from which the Board could reasonably find that the subject property rezoned to OT fulfills the purpose of providing a transition between this distant retail/employment area and the residential areas adjacent to the subject property.

The Petitioner also contends that the subject property as rezoned to and developed under the OT District would provide a transition between MD 97 and the adjacent residential areas. The Board finds that there was no convincing evidence presented that rezoning the subject property to the OT District with the proposed development would provide any greater transition for the residential uses than would the development of the subject property with a residence. The fact that the lots in the Glenwood Springs subdivision adjacent to the subject property are fairly distant from MD 97, combined with the fact that so much vegetation exists between those residential uses and MD 97 renders any impact of the road on those residential uses as minimal and any need for transition as unnecessary.

24. The evidence which the Petitioner presented to show that the site meets the requirements of Section 117.3.B, as required by Section 117.3G.2, is insufficient to convince the Board that those requirements had been entirely met. Section 117.3B provides that "the OT district may be established at a particular location if . . . 1. the site has frontage on and direct access to an arterial road . . . 2.b. the site abuts or is directly across a public street from . . . a government building or use, including public schools, that adjoins a non-residential district."

The Board finds that the site is directly across a public street, MD 97, from a government building or use, the new Bushy Park Elementary School (parcel 15) that adjoins a non-residential district. In this regard, the Board agrees with and adopts the interpretation provided by the

Department of Planning and Zoning on page 6 of its TSR that parcel 15 is adjoining the non-residential district across Carrs Mill Road, a local road, based on the definition of "adjoining property" found in Section 16.108(b)(1) of the Howard County Subdivision Regulations. This definition is applicable, in turn, based on Section 101K of the Zoning Regulations.

While the Board finds that the site has frontage on MD 97, the Board is not convinced by the evidence presented that "the site" has direct access to MD 97 for the proposed development under OT zoning. The Board agrees with and adopts the reasoning of the Department of Planning and Zoning on this fact for the reasons stated on page 6 of the TSR. The subject property clearly has direct access to an arterial Road, MD 97, for development of a residential lot as currently zoned. But the Board finds that the site's proposed zoning and development under OT zoning does not have approval for direct access to MD 97 from SHA based on the SHA's May 16, 2006 letter. The SHA clearly indicated in that letter that the specified frontage improvements would be required to gain access for the proposed commercial use.

While the Board notes that Mr. Keeler testified that the SHA had somewhat modified its position, the Board also notes that the SHA had not done so in writing, and the Board declines to rely on or give much weight to hearsay testimony over an official report in writing on such an important issue as access. Moreover, the Board finds that even Mr. Keeler testified that acceleration and deceleration lane improvements exceeding the Petitioner's frontage on MD 97 would still possibly be required and therefore could be impossible to accomplish. The Board finds that the Petitioner has not presented convincing evidence that the site's proposed development under OT zoning has access to an arterial road.

25. The evidence which the Petitioner presented to show that safe access can be provided at the proposed points of access to the site, as required by Section 117.3G.3, is

insufficient to convince the Board that safe access can be provided for the same reasons as provided in Finding 23 above with regard to access. The Board finds that the evidence Petitioner presented with regard to sight distance, its sight distance analysis, did convince the Board that adequate sight distance can be provided as required by Section 117.3G.3 but this section also requires that safe access be assured and the Board cannot find that standard has been met.

- 26. The Board finds that the Petitioner did present sufficient evidence for the Board to find that the site layout and landscaping will buffer neighboring residences from business uses as required by Section 117.3G.4. The Board finds that the Petitioner met this standard based on the fact that evidence was presented that all of the existing vegetation on the site would remain, that the buffering required by County standards would be provided, and that the building was proposed to be located closer the front of the site oriented towards MD 97 with all the parking to be located between the building and MD 97, out of the view of neighboring residences.
- 27. The Board also finds that the Petitioner did present sufficient evidence for the Board to find that the parking areas and driveways are oriented towards neighboring non-residential uses and screened from residential land uses as required by Section 117.3G.5 for the same reasons as stated in Finding 26 above.
- The Board finds that the Petitioner did present sufficient evidence for the Board to find that no more than 50 per cent of the site may be covered by impervious surfaces as required by Section 117.3G.6. The Board finds that the Petitioner met this standard based on the DPZ TSR which indicated that 16 per cent of the site would be impervious area.
- 29. The Board finds that the Petitioner did present sufficient evidence for the Board to find that the design of new structures will be generally compatible in scale and character with the residential structures in the vicinity as required by Section 117.3G.7. The size of the proposed

building without the garage is less than 5,000 square feet which is similar in size to many of the residential structures in the adjoining residential community. The design of the building to be a low-impact use and to resemble a residential use would be in character with the residential structures in the community.

- 30. The Board finds that the Petitioner did present sufficient evidence for the Board to find that the proposed hours of operation and proposed lighting, which was the minimal lighting necessary to provide security and designed to shine down and not out to adjoining properties, will not adversely impact the adjoining residential neighborhood as required by Section 1117.3G.8.
- 31. The Board notes that some of the evidence presented in this case, including the evidence as to the need or lack of need for doctor's offices in the area, the informal discussions between the Petitioner and the adjoining residential community as to the proposed use, and the feasibility or desirability of the subject property for residential development, are not material to any of the standards in Section 117.3G of the Zoning Regulations, and therefore will not be addressed by the Board in this decision.

CONCLUSIONS OF LAW

1. The Petitioner, as one seeking a piecemeal rezoning to the OT Zoning District, a floating zone, has the burden of demonstrating that its petition, with its proposed PDP, meets all the standards for approval of Section 117.3G of the Howard County Zoning Regulations. If this burden is not met, the Zoning Board is not permitted to grant the requested rezoning. This burden of proof on the Petitioner is one of the preponderance of the evidence to show that the request meets all prescribed standards and requirements pursuant to Section 2.403D.3 of the Board's Rules of Procedure.

- 2. The evidence which the Petitioner has presented to show that the proposed rezoning will accomplish the purposes of the OT District, pursuant to Section 117.3G.1 of the Zoning Regulations, is insufficient to meet the burden of proof as to this standard based on the Board's Findings 22 and 23. The Board concludes that the Petitioner failed to meet its burden to show that the proposed OT District, with its PDP, on the subject property would provide a transition between adjacent residential areas and nearby retail/employment areas or arterial highways carrying high volumes of traffic. This conclusion was based on the Board's finding that the Petitioner failed to meet its burden to show that the adjacent residential areas would be impacted by either the distant retail/employment uses across Carrs Mill Road or MD 97 in the first place, so that a transition by the OT District would be unnecessary.
- The evidence which the Petitioner has presented to show that the site meets the requirements of Section 117.3B, pursuant to Section 117.3G.2 of the Zoning Regulations, is insufficient to meet its burden to show that the site, as proposed to be rezoned and developed, has direct access to an arterial road based on the Board's Finding 24. This conclusion is based on the Board's finding that the Petitioner had failed to meet its burden to show, based on the SHA's May 16, 2006 letter, that it could assure that the SHA's required deceleration and acceleration lane improvements could be made within the subject property's 128 feet of frontage. The Board cannot definitely conclude that the site, as proposed to be rezoned and developed, will have approved access to MD 97 from the SHA based on the evidence in the record. The Board concludes that the site's unquestioned access to MD 97 for the permitted residential development on it is not material to the proposed rezoning and development of the subject property in the OT zone and the access issue associated with that proposal.

- 4. The evidence which the Petitioner has presented to show that safe access can be provided at proposed points of access to the site, pursuant to Section 117.3G.3 of the Zoning Regulations, is insufficient to meet its burden as to this standard based on the Board's Finding 24 and 25, for the same reasons stated in Conclusion 3.
- 5. The Board concludes that the Petitioner presented sufficient evidence to meet all the remaining standards contained in Section 117.3G of the Zoning Regulations, but the Board concludes that the Board may grant a petition for OT rezoning only if all the standards of that section have been met. The Board concludes that it may not grant the subject petition because Petitioner failed to meet its burden of producing sufficient evidence that would allow the Board to find that the standards of Section 117.3G.1 through 3 have been met.

For the foregoing reasons, the Zoning Board of Howard County, Maryland, on this 5 day of September, 2006, hereby DENIES the Petitioner's request for rezoning of the subject property from the RR-DEO to the OT District.

ATTEST:

Robin Regner

Administrative Assistant

PREPARED BY HOWARD COUNTY OFFICE OF LAW

BARBARA M. COOK COUNTY SOLICITOR

Deputy County Solicitor

ZONING BOARD OF HOWARD COUNTY

Guy Guzzone, Chairperson

Ken Ulman, Vice Chairperson

Calvin Ball

Charles Feaga

Christopher J. Merdon